

Michael F. Easley
Governor



State of North Carolina Office of the Governor

For Release: **IMMEDIATE**
Date: Nov. 16, 2005

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GOV. EASLEY ANNOUNCES ASSISTANCE FOR HIGH HEATING BILLS

Redirects State Resources; Joins With Energy Companies to Provide Weatherization and Crisis Aid

RALEIGH - Gov. Mike Easley today announced a plan to provide nearly \$10 million in public and private resources to help low-income North Carolinians with the high heating costs expected this winter. The funds will be used to provide needy residents with home weatherization and crisis assistance to help pay utility bills. The combined resources are anticipated to serve about 70,000 North Carolina families.

"I commend our corporate citizens, including Progress Energy, Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas, PSNC, North Carolina Power and the Electricities that provide power to North Carolina citizens," said Easley. "These additional dollars allow us to make nearly \$10 million available to provide crisis assistance and cut the state weatherization waiting list in half.

"The unusually high fuel prices this year highlight the need for a national energy solution," said Easley. "I have joined with other governors to urge Washington to act, but in the meantime, we are going to do what we can to help our most vulnerable citizens stay warm this winter. Through the weatherization program alone, average consumers will see their energy bill reduced by about a quarter."

Most utility programs offer some type of charitable contribution program where customers and/or their employees can donate money that will go to other customers struggling to pay their bills. Some companies, including Duke and Progress provide matching funds for donations.

Easley said the state will provide a total of \$6.5 million for this effort. This includes \$3.4 million in crisis intervention funds from the Contingency & Emergency Fund. The use of these funds must be approved by the Council of State. The Governor also announced that energy companies will match the state's crisis intervention program by providing \$3.4 million in donations for use by low-income consumers statewide. In addition, the state will redirect \$3.1 million in existing funding to weatherization programs.

Energy costs are expected to rise dramatically for the coming heating season, with natural gas prices rising more than 50 percent and heating oil and propane prices increasing more than 30 percent over last year's prices. According to conservative estimates, these price increases will increase the average home utility bills by \$300 to \$400 over the course of the heating season.

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